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General debate on national experience in population matters: adolescents and youth

Statement submitted by International Planned Parenthood Federation (Africa region), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.9/2012/2.

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Statement

In Africa, young people aged 15 and under form almost 46 per cent of the entire population. This signifies that Africa is a fast-growing young population with an ever-increasing demand for sexual reproductive health services to meet its needs. It is common knowledge that young people are the future and that what happens to them today will determine what becomes of their communities and societies in the decades ahead. Significant barriers frequently deter African youth from obtaining urgently needed sexual health services. In many countries, millions of young people are deprived of their most basic rights to shelter, health, education, appropriate contraception and sexual and reproductive health services. They also stand in the path of one of the deadliest epidemics ever: HIV/AIDS. The statistics indicate that:

- Every day, about 6,000 young people aged 15 to 24 become infected with HIV, globally accounting for half of all new infections
- An estimated 11.8 million young people (7.3 million young women and 4.5 million young men) were living with HIV/AIDS at the end of 2001

Young people are disproportionately affected by the HIV pandemic and remain at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in terms of rates of infection, vulnerability, impact and potential for change. They face the economic and social impact of HIV/AIDS on families, communities and nations.

Access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services

International Planned Parenthood Federation (Africa region) is a youth-serving organization providing quality sexual and reproductive health and HIV services to the community, mainly young people, in a rights-based manner. It has vast experience, reach and influence in such areas as the sexual and reproductive health and human rights of youth, and capacity-building in youth leadership, advocacy and management. At the regional level, the organization is present in 42 countries through a network of member associations that advocate for and provide quality sexual and reproductive health and HIV services to communities, mainly young people. The organization believes that investments in young people as a new generation of leadership can yield gains in addressing the gaps and challenges of accessing quality sexual and reproductive health and HIV services. It supports meaningful youth participation in the design, delivery and governance of sexual and reproductive health and HIV programmes through an organized youth action movement structure. The members of the movement and other youth volunteers constitute a considerable force in supporting the establishment of over 100 youth-friendly clinics and centres, where young people can access appropriate, gender-sensitive and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services. The members and volunteers also provide a critical mass of young people who are well versed in counselling and facilitating training for other young people in communities on issues of sexual reproductive health and rights. As a pioneer of comprehensive sexuality education for youth in and out of school, the organization continues to engage schools, larger communities and partner organizations in capacity-building on sexuality education to build healthful behaviours. Condom distribution is central to the work of the organization. Condoms and other contraceptives are accessible to young people through a community-based distribution system, static and mobile clinics and placements in strategic access points.

International Planned Parenthood Federation (Africa region) believes in evidence-based programming. Research is instrumental in bringing about innovation, in providing new information in the fight against HIV and AIDS, and in reporting. Effective and focused materials that adopt the information, education and communication method or the behaviour change communication method have been developed with young people in mind. Where young people are well informed of HIV risks and prevention strategies, they are changing their behaviour in ways that reduce their vulnerability. For example, in Togo, targeted sexuality education has led to delayed sexual debut and the increased use of condoms, resulting in a decrease in HIV prevalence among young people. Health services provided by the member associations of the International Planned Parenthood Federation are very affordable, cater to minors or unmarried adults and provide treatment for sexually transmitted infections. International Planned Parenthood Federation makes special efforts to recognize and respect the social, sexual and economic diversities of young people and provides a platform to cater to the needs of different minority groups, such as young sex workers; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex migrant youth; and young people in emergency situations. Peer education and the provision of special sexual and reproductive health and HIV packages for emergency situations is essential in this.